

## 2 US ships carry items for Gaza's aid corridor

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — Two U.S. military ships carrying the supplies needed to build a humanitarian aid corridor off Gaza's shore are moving closer to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, as the Pentagon works with aid groups to begin deliveries as early as the end of this month.

The logistics vessel USAV General Frank Besson entered the Mediterranean on Wednesday, U.S. European Command said in an email to Stars and Stripes.

The ship, which left the United States on March 9, is carrying supplies to build an 1,800-foot-long causeway that would work in tandem with a floating Navy-built and operated dock. The structure would deliver as many as 2 million meals daily into Gaza, EUCOM said.

MV Roy P. Benavidez, assigned to the Military Sealift

Command and carrying modular pieces for the pier system, was traveling south of the Italian island of Sardinia on April 1, according to a USNI News fleet tracker published the same day.

Full operational capability of the dock and causeway was expected by the end of April or early May, matching the 60-day estimate announced in March, Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, a spokesman for the Defense Department, told reporters Thursday at a Pentagon briefing.

The DOD was still working with the U.S. Agency for International Development and other groups to finalize the details on how the food would be received and distributed, Ryder said.

An April 1 Israeli airstrike that killed seven humanitarian workers and resulted in some aid agencies suspending their operations in Gaza hasn't made the job easier, Ryder said Thursday.

"But that has not deterred us

from continuing to work with groups and (non-governmental organizations) to come up with solutions," he said.

Four other Army ships — USAVs Monterrey, Matamoros, SP4 James A. Loux and Wilson Wharf — are still en route, EUCOM said.

On Friday, those vessels were at port in the Canary Islands, Gibraltar-based ship watcher Michael Sanchez said. He estimated, based on a relatively slow speed, the ships could travel the 680 nautical miles to the Strait of Gibraltar in as little as three days.

Military Sealift Command ships USNS 1st Lt. Baldomero Lopez and USNS 2nd Lt. John P. Bobo were still in the U.S., loading supplies and equipment for the Navy dock April 1, according to the USNI report.

The Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore project includes a large floating dock to be built by the

Navy about 3 miles off the Gaza shore. Cargo would be transported from the dock by Navy ferries to the Army causeway, according to a DOD statement on March 20.

No U.S. service members would be on the ground in Gaza. Israel would provide security on shore, Ryder said.

The construction is expected to take several weeks to build and test before cargo moves ashore, according to EUCOM.

U.S. Central Command would continue to provide meals and water via air drops to Gaza in coordination with partner organizations and nations, unless directed otherwise.

Also on Thursday, the National Security Council announced in a statement that Israel had agreed to open the port of Ashdod and the crossing at Erez to facilitate the distribution of aid into Gaza. Ashdod is about 23 miles north of Erez.

## Israel pulls troops from south Gaza; clearing Hamas still goal

*Associated Press*

JERUSALEM — Israel's military announced Sunday that it had withdrawn its forces from the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, wrapping up a key phase in its ground offensive against the Hamas militant group and bringing its troop presence in the territory to one of the lowest levels since the six-month war began.

Military officials, speaking on condition of anonymity under army policy, said a "significant force" remained in Gaza and would preserve the army's "freedom of action" to continue targeted operations across the territory, including Khan Younis, a Hamas stronghold that has been Israel's main focus for several months.

Still, the withdrawal was a significant milestone as Israel and Hamas marked six months of fighting. The Israeli officials said the 98th paratroopers division would recuperate and prepare for future operations.

Israel previously claimed to have dismantled Hamas forces in Khan Younis, the hometown of the group's leader, Yehya Sinwar.

AP video in Khan Younis on Sunday showed some people returning to a landscape marked by shattered multistory buildings and climbing over debris to explore crumbled, dusty remains.

Israel has vowed a ground offensive on the southernmost Gaza city of Rafah, considered Hamas' last stronghold, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday told his Cabinet that victory means "elimination of Hamas in the entire Gaza Strip, including Rafah."

But Rafah shelters some 1.4 million people — more than half of Gaza's population. The prospect of an offensive has raised global alarm, including from Israel's top ally, the United States, which has demanded to see a

credible plan to protect civilians. Allowing people to return to nearby Khan Younis could relieve some pressure on Rafah.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby told ABC the U.S. believes that the partial Israeli withdrawal "is really just about rest and refit for these troops that have been on the ground for four months and not necessarily, that we can tell, indicative of some coming new operation for these troops."

The six-month mark has been met with growing frustration in Israel, where anti-government protests have swelled and anger is mounting over what some see as government inaction to help free about 130 remaining hostages, about a quarter of whom Israel has said are dead. Negotiations in pursuit of a cease-fire in exchange for the hostages' release were expected to resume in Cairo on Sunday.

# Pacific Army leader mum on new missiles

By SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — The U.S. Army will field newly developed missiles in the Indo-Pacific region this year with additional types in the pipeline, its Pacific-area commander told reporters on a recent visit to the Japanese capital.

"I'm not going to discuss what system and I'm not going to say where and when," Gen. Charles Flynn said during a media roundtable Tuesday at the U.S. Embassy. "I'm just saying that there will be a long-range precision fire capability."

The U.S. and allies Japan and the Philippines are gearing up for

a potential fight with China, which boasts a formidable missile force, around Taiwan or in the South China Sea.

In November, Flynn told reporters at the Halifax International Security Forum in Canada that the Army would deploy a limited number of Tomahawk and SM-6 missiles to the region, according to a Nov. 19 report in *Defense One*.

Land-based Tomahawks, with a range of over 1,500 miles, were banned under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

But the U.S. pulled out of the treaty in 2019, due to Russian non-

compliance, and the Marine Corps established its first Tomahawk unit in July 2023 at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

"I'm not going to say where or when we will deploy in 2024," Flynn said in Japan. "There's actually multiple systems in development."

Flynn during the roundtable mentioned the Typhoon launcher, which is designed to fire the SM-6 and Tomahawk missiles. That system has a "hypersonic capability," he said, referring to missiles that can travel faster than five times the speed of sound.

Flynn also spoke about the long-range, anti-ship Precision

Strike Missile, which is set to reach initial operating capability this year.

"This new surface-to-surface weapon system will deliver enhanced capabilities to attack, neutralize, suppress and destroy targets using missile-delivered indirect fires out to 499+ kilometers (310+ miles)," manufacturer Lockheed Martin wrote on its website.

"We shoot HIMARS in a number of these countries today," Flynn said in Halifax. "This is just a different missile to put into it. So, I don't necessarily think we need to have an agreement (with other countries) ahead of time."

## Koehler takes Pacific Fleet reins after leading 3rd Fleet

By WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — A naval aviator and former commander of 3rd Fleet assumed command of U.S. Pacific Fleet during a Thursday ceremony in Hawaii.

Adm. Stephen Koehler replaces Adm. Samuel Paparo, who is slated to take the reins of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command next month.

Paparo will replace Adm. John Aquilino, who has headed Indo-Pacific Command since April 2021.

During remarks at the pier-side ceremony, Aquilino was effusive in his praise for Paparo and Koehler, describing them as "the world's greatest warfighters."

Pacific Fleet's area of operation encompasses roughly 100 million square miles, spanning from the Arctic in the north to Antarctica in the south.

The fleet consists of about 200 ships, 1,500 aircraft and 150,000

uniformed and civilian personnel.

Koehler is a 1986 graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder and was commissioned through the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps, according to his official Navy biography.

He was designated a naval aviator in March 1989 and has flown more than 3,900 hours in F-14 Tomcat and F-18 Super Hornet fighter jets, making 600 carrier landings.

Among his career commands were the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan, the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and Carrier Strike Group 9.

His tours supported operations Desert Storm, Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom, Inherent Resolve and Freedom's Sentinel.

He was a deputy commander for Pacific Fleet and commanded the San Diego-based 3rd Fleet. Most recently, he was director for strategy, plans and policy with the Joint Staff in the Pentagon.

## Missing soldier posing as civilian found, arrested

By MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — A U.S. soldier initially listed as missing and spotted last year at an Air Force base in Germany under an assumed name has been found and taken into custody, an Army statement said Friday.

Staff Sgt. Jonathan Lane, 31, a helicopter repairer assigned to the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade at U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach, was reported missing June 27 after he failed to show up for duty.

It was later discovered he had tried to access Ramstein Air Force Base and Landstuhl Regional Medical Center four days prior under the name "David Hersher." Ramstein is about 125 miles west of Lane's duty station in Bavaria.

"We are thankful that Staff Sgt. Lane has been found," brigade commander Col. Ryan Kendall said Friday in a statement. "We are grateful for the collaborative efforts of the German Polizei and Army [Criminal Investigation Division]. Lane would not have been

found if it wasn't for the help our host nation provided."

Lane was apprehended with help from Ansbach and regional police in the vicinity of the southwest German city of Trier, CID spokesman Thomas Hamilton III said Friday.

No further details regarding Lane's discovery and capture were available Friday, according to brigade officials and Hamilton.

Lane was spotted last year on June 23 in his vehicle at brigade headquarters on Katterbach Kaserne, a CID statement July 18 said. Later that day, Lane, wearing a blue T-shirt and portraying himself as a civilian, attempted to access Ramstein Air Base.

He was last seen at 3:18 p.m. entering a gate at nearby Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. Army officials at the time declined to say whether he received treatment, citing medical privacy rules.

Lane's car was found abandoned two days later near Urbach in the state of Rheinland-Pfalz, about two hours north of Ramstein, the CID statement said.

# Navy launches app to track Red Hill closure

By **WYATT OLSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Navy task force overseeing permanent closure of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Hawaii has launched a mobile app offering the latest developments in tank cleaning, closure and environmental cleanup.

Late last month, Navy Closure Task Force-Red Hill assumed control of decommissioning the site from an initial task force that had emptied more than 104 million gallons of fuel there.

The app is a repurposing of

one created by the first task force last summer to keep the public informed of its progress in defueling the tanks.

“Taking over the Joint Task Force-Red Hill app and re-branding with Navy Closure Task Force provides an additional outreach opportunity to keep the public informed about the decommissioning progress,” Rear Adm. Steve Barnett, who heads the task force and also commands Navy Region Hawaii, said in a release.

“This app is another communication method we are using to share important information and to reach a larger audience

across numerous digital platforms,” he said.

The new Navy app can be downloaded on the iOS app store for Apple devices or the Google Play store for Android users. It can be found by searching “NCTF-Red Hill.”

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in March 2022 ordered the World War II-era facility permanently closed after it leaked jet fuel in late 2021 that contaminated the Navy’s water distribution system. Thousands of people living in military housing communities on or near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam were forced to temporarily

relocate as the Navy flushed it out.

One well, which remains isolated from the system, is still contaminated. The extent of soil contamination around and below the underground tank complex remains unknown.

Hundreds of residents and former residents have filed suit in federal court seeking compensation for medical conditions and other hardships they have said arose from the contamination.

The task force must remove about 4,000 gallons of residual fuel in the pipelines that was not possible to drain using gravity.

# US, allies to flex military muscle in South China Sea

By **JOSEPH DITZLER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — The United States and three of its Pacific allies planned a military exercise in the South China Sea on Sunday, a move to demonstrate their rights to navigate and overfly the region freely, according to a statement from all four defense chiefs Friday.

The U.S., Australia, Japan and the Philippines planned a “maritime cooperative activity” in the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone involving naval and air force units, according to the statement on the U.S. Department of Defense website.

China apparently responded Sunday with its own “joint naval and air strategic patrol” in the South China Sea, according to the official China Military Online website.

“All military activities disrupting the South China Sea situation and creating buzzes are under control,” according to the brief report, which cited a statement from the Chinese military’s Southern Theater Command on Sunday morning.

The DOD release did not specify where the exercise would take place or which assets would be involved. Email queries to U.S. 7th Fleet at Yoko-

suka Naval Base and U.S. Forces Japan did not draw an immediate response Sunday.

Ultimately, the statement reads, the exercise will strengthen the four powers’ ability to work together using one another’s military training methods, equipment and tactics.

“Every country should be free to conduct lawful air and maritime operations. These activities with our allies Australia, Japan and the Philippines underscore our shared commitment to ensuring that all countries are free to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law al-

lows,” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in the statement. “Our operations together support peace and stability at the heart of our shared vision for a free and open region.”

Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles, Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara and Philippines Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro Jr. endorsed the announcement.

“Japan believes the issue concerning the South China Sea is directly related to the peace and stability of the region and is a legitimate concern of the international community,” Kihara wrote.

# Drones attack Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuke plant

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Officials at the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant said the site was attacked Sunday by Ukrainian military drones, including a strike on the dome of the plant’s sixth unit.

According to the plant authorities, there was no critical damage or casualties and radiation levels at the plant were

normal after the strikes. Later on Sunday, however, Russian state-owned nuclear agency Rosatom said three people were wounded in the “unprecedented series of drone attacks,” specifically when a drone hit an area close to the site’s canteen.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said Sunday that its experts had been informed of the drone strike and

that “such detonation is consistent with IAEA observations.”

Without apportioning blame, the head of the U.N.’s atomic watchdog agency, Rafael Mariano Grossi, warned of the safety risks of such attacks.

“I urge refraining from actions that contradict the 5 IAEA principles and jeopardize nuclear safety,” he said on X.

The power plant has been

caught in the crossfire since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in 2022 and seized the facility shortly after. The IAEA has repeatedly expressed alarm about the nuclear power plant, Europe’s largest, amid fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe. Both Ukraine and Russia have regularly accused the other of attacking the plant, which is still close to the front lines.



# US small-town businesses embrace the eclipse crowd

Associated Press

WAXAHACHIE, Texas — The last time a total solar eclipse passed through this Texas town, horses and buggies filled the streets and cotton fetched 9 cents a pound. Nearly 150 years later, one thing hasn't changed: the threat of clouds blocking the view.

Overcast skies are forecast for Monday's cosmic wonder across Texas, already packing in eclipse chasers to the delight of small-town businesses.

As the moon covers the sun, daytime darkness will follow a narrow corridor — from Mexico's Pacific coast to Texas and 14 other states all the way to Maine and the eastern fringes of Canada. The best U.S. forecast: northern New England.

Like other communities along the path of totality, Waxahachie, a half-hour's drive south of Dallas, pulled out all the stops with a weekend full of concerts and other festivities.

It's the region's first total solar

eclipse since 1878. The next one won't be for almost another 300 years.

"I feel so lucky that I don't have to go anywhere," the Ellis County Museum's Suzette Pylant said Saturday as she welcomed visitors in town for the eclipse. "I get to just look out my window, walk out my door and look up."

She's praying the weather will cooperate, as are the owners of all the shops clustered around the historic courthouse made of red sandstone and pink granite in the center of town. They're bracing for a few hundred thousand visitors for Monday's 4 minutes, 20 seconds of totality, close to the maximum of 4 minutes, 28 seconds elsewhere on the path.

The Oily Bar Soapery hosted a Bubble Blackout all weekend, with eclipse-themed soaps and giveaways. Among the handmade soaps: "Luna," "Solar Power," "Mother Earth" and "Hachie Eclipse of the Heart."

The next one is centuries away "so we figured we'd go all out," explained owner Kalee Hume.

Nazir Moosa, who owns the Celebrity Cafe and Bakery, winced when he heard the weather report, but noted: "It's weather. You can't control it."

North of Austin, Williamson County residents hope the eclipse puts the area's new park on the map.

The River Ranch County Park, which opened in July on the outskirts of Liberty Hill, is sold out and ready to host hundreds on Monday.

Stacie Kenyon is inviting people to watch the eclipse from her Main Street Marketplace in the heart of Liberty Hill's historic downtown — and escape inside the boutique if it rains.

"We were really hopeful, but now with this weather it is kind of a bummer," Kenyon said. "We will just have to wait and see."

Totality won't sweep across the U.S. like this again until 2045, sidestepping almost all of Texas.

# Powerball player in Ore. wins \$1.3 billion

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — A Powerball player in Oregon won a jackpot worth more than \$1.3 billion on Sunday, ending a winless streak that had stretched more than three months.

The single ticket — revealed following a delay of more than three hours to the drawing — matched all six numbers drawn to win the jackpot worth \$1.326 billion, Powerball said in a statement.

The jackpot has a cash value of \$621 million if the winner chooses to take a lump sum rather than an annuity paid over 30 years, with an immediate payout followed by 29 annual installments. The prize is subject to federal taxes, while many states also tax lottery winnings.

The winning numbers drawn early Sunday morning were: 22, 27, 44, 52, 69 and the red Powerball 9.

Until the latest drawing, no one had won Powerball's top prize since New Year's Day, amounting to 41 consecutive drawings without a jackpot winner, tying a streak set twice before in 2022 and 2021.

The \$1.326 billion prize ranks as the eighth largest in U.S. lottery history.

As the prizes grow, the drawings attract more ticket sales and the jackpots subsequently become harder to hit. The game's long odds for the weekend drawing were 1 in 292.2 million.

Saturday night's scheduled drawing was held up and took place in the Florida Lottery studio just before 2:30 a.m. Sunday to enable one of the organizers to complete required procedures before the scheduled time of 10:59 p.m., Powerball said in a statement.

# Mexico cuts ties with Ecuador after police storm embassy, arrest leader

Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador — Mexico's government ended diplomatic ties with Ecuador after police broke into the Mexican Embassy late Friday to arrest a former Ecuadorian vice president, an extraordinary use of force that shocked and mystified regional leaders and diplomats.

Ecuadorian police broke through the external doors of the embassy in the capital, Quito, to arrest Jorge Glas, who had been residing there since December.

Glas sought political asylum at the embassy after being in-

dicted on corruption charges.

The raid prompted Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to announce the breaking of diplomatic relations with Ecuador on Friday evening, while his government's foreign relations secretary said the move will be challenged at the World Court in The Hague.

"This is not possible. It cannot be. This is crazy," Roberto Canseco, head of the Mexican consular section in Quito, told local press while standing outside the embassy right after the raid. "I am very worried be-

cause they could kill him. There is no basis to do this. This is totally outside the norm."

On Saturday, Glas was taken by armored vehicle from the attorney general's office to an airport, where he boarded an aircraft for a flight to the port city of Guayaquil, 265 miles south of Quito. People who had gathered outside the prosecutor's office yelled "strength" as the convoy of police and military vehicles moved off.

Ecuador's corrections agency said Glas will remain in custody at a maximum-security facility in Guayaquil.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Students walk out after veto of education funds

**AK** JUNEAU — Students in Alaska's capital walked out of school Thursday and marched through the halls of the statehouse to protest Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy's latest education veto and the Legislature's failure to override it.

The walkout was part of a protest organized by the executive board of the Alaska Association of Student Governments, said Felix Myers, a student organizer from Sitka. Plans called for 40-minute walkouts at schools across Alaska, with 40 representing the number of votes lawmakers needed to override the veto.

Dunleavy in March made good on a threat to veto a package overwhelmingly passed by lawmakers that called for a \$175 million increase in aid to districts through a school funding formula. He complained the measure lacked provisions he supported, including a three-year program offering annual bonuses of up to \$15,000 as a way to attract and keep teachers and changes to the application process for charter schools aimed at promoting those schools.

### NYC Marathon won't have to pay to use bridge

**NY** NEW YORK — New York's governor on Thursday ordered the state's transit agency to drop efforts to impose a \$750,000 fee on the New York City Marathon for using the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge.

Gov. Kathy Hochul also en-

couraged the New York Road Runners, organizers of the venerable race held the first Sunday of each November, to find other ways to generate revenue for mass transit, such as purchasing advertising on public buses and trains.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has said the requested fee represented the estimated amount of toll revenue lost when the nation's longest suspension bridge is closed for the 26.2-mile race, which is the largest marathon in the world with more than 50,000 participants annually.

### Chinese signatures on certificates cause stir

**VA** FAIRFAX — A northern Virginia town has been excluded from a countywide police training academy after the town's chief complained about Chinese signatures on trainees' graduation certificates.

Herndon Police Chief Maggie DeBoard complained that the academy director, Maj. Wilson Lee, used Chinese characters to sign the certificates that graduates receive when they complete training at the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy.

In an email sent last month, DeBoard told Lee, "I just found out that the academy graduation certificates were signed by you in some other language, not in English. This is unacceptable for my agency. I don't want our Herndon officers to receive these and I am requesting that they are issued certificates signed in English, the language that they are expected to use as an officer."

On March 18, the county's deputy executive for safety and security, Thomas Arnold, wrote to DeBoard informing her that the county was terminating Herndon's affiliation with the academy.

### Inmates who sued will get to view solar eclipse

**NY** NEW YORK — Six inmates who sued New York's corrections department over its decision to lock down prisons during next Monday's total solar eclipse will get to watch the celestial event after all.

Lawyers for the six men incarcerated at the Woodbourne Correctional Facility in upstate New York said Thursday that they've reached a settlement with the state that will allow the men to view the solar eclipse "in accordance with their sincerely held religious beliefs."

They filed a federal suit last week arguing the April 8 lockdown violates inmates' constitutional rights to practice their faiths by preventing them from taking part in a religiously significant event. The six men include a Baptist, a Muslim, a Seventh-Day Adventist, two practitioners of Santeria, and an atheist.

### Voters OK ban on private money for elections

**WI** MADISON — Private money to fund elections will be banned in Wisconsin after voters approved a constitutional amendment put forward by Republicans in reaction to grants received in 2020 that were funded by donations from Facebook founder Mark

Zuckerberg.

Voters also approved a second question put on the ballot by the Republican-controlled Legislature that amends the constitution to say that only election officials can administer elections. That's already state law, but putting it in the constitution makes it more difficult to repeal or change.

By adopting the amendments, "voters sent a clear message that they want to keep private money out of election administration," said Rick Esenberg, president of the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty.

Democrats opposed both measures, arguing they would make it more difficult to conduct elections in the presidential battleground state. They also raised concerns about how the broadly written election workers provision would be interpreted and implemented by local election officials.

### Home possibly hit by object from space station

**FL** NAPLES — NASA says it's investigating whether an object that crashed into the roof of a home in southwest Florida last month came from the international space station.

Workers for the space agency picked up the object from the homeowner in Naples last week and took it to the Kennedy Space Center, across the state in Cape Canaveral, where it is being analyzed to determine its origin, NASA spokesman Josh Finch said.

Space debris typically burns up while reentering the atmosphere.

— From wire reports

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# UConn tops Tide, returns to title game

*Associated Press*

GLENDAL, Ariz. — The final result showed UConn winning its 11th straight NCAA Tournament game by at least 13 points.

The reality: The Huskies were tested unlike any other time during their run toward a possible second straight national title.

UConn kept its composure and its bid to repeat as national champion intact, getting 21 points from freshman Stephon Castle while clamping down defensively in the second half of an 86-72 win over Alabama in the Final Four on Saturday night.

“Our identity is to be pretty relentless,” UConn coach Dan Hurley said. “We might not break you for 18 minutes, 25 minutes, but at some point if what we’re doing at both ends and on the backboard is at a high level, it just becomes hard for the other team to sustain it.”

The top-seeded Huskies (36-3) put on a March Madness show before arriving in the desert, a stretch that included a 30-0 run in a decimation of Illinois in the Elite Eight.

This was more of a slow burn.

Alabama (25-12) made the most of its first Final Four, hitting a flurry of 3-pointers to go toe to toe with a team that trailed

for 28 total seconds during its first four NCAA Tournament games.

Crafty point guard Mark Sears did his best to keep Alabama in it, scoring 24 points. Grant Nelson had another big game in March Madness, finishing with 19 points, 15 rebounds and one highlight-reel dunk over UConn big man Donovan Clingan.

UConn, as it usually does under Hurley, wore the Tide into submission.

Clingan started asserting himself in the post offensively, finishing with 18 points and four blocked shots. Castle and Alex Karaban (14 points) hit big shots as the Huskies stretched the lead.

And one of the nation’s best defenses flexed at just right time, holding the Tide without a field goal for a game-turning five-minute stretch that put UConn on the cusp of becoming the first repeat champion since Florida in 2006-07.

“They’re close to being bulletproof,” Alabama coach Nate Oats said.

Next up for the Huskies is what should be a heavyweight bout in Monday’s national championship game against Purdue.

“A battle of the giants. I think it’s just great for college basketball. Us and Purdue have clearly been the two best teams in the country the last two years,” Hurley said. “I

think it’s just great for college basketball to get the two big dogs playing on Monday.”

The Huskies spent the tournament’s first two weeks terrorizing opponents to the tune of a 27.8-point average margin of victory.

Alabama stuck a stick in the spokes of the juggernaut by pulling Clingan away from the basket and burying 3-pointers.

Clingan had two early blocks and appeared to be on his way to duplicating his Elite Eight performance, when Illinois went 0-for-19 on shots he contested.

Once the Crimson Tide started forcing Clingan into high pick-and-rolls, lanes to the basket started opening up — as did the 3-point line.

Alabama thrived from 3 all season, taking down Clemson in the Elite Eight by making 16 shots from deep. The Tide kept it rolling against UConn, making 8 of 11 in the first half while Sears repeatedly got to the rim, putting the Huskies seemingly right where they wanted them. Nope.

The Huskies kept their composure amid the Alabama 3-point barrage, calmly ran their offense and led 44-40 at halftime.

UConn shut down Alabama’s open looks from the 3-point arc and started getting the ball into Clingan, who overpowered the Tide when he got near the rim.

## Edey, Purdue power way into championship game

*Associated Press*

GLENDAL, Ariz. — There was more than one team that came to the Final Four with a dream — more than one team hoping to add its own unforgettable chapter to college basketball’s colorful history book.

Zach Edey and Purdue have been thinking big all year, and after snuffing out North Carolina State’s magical season with a 63-50 victory Saturday, it’s the Boilermakers who find themselves a win away from the program’s first NCAA title.

“It’s the one we’ve been talking about all year,” said Edey, the 7-foot-4 center who played all 40 minutes and finished with 20 points and 12 rebounds.

For the past three weeks, though, a lot of the country has been caught up in N.C. State. The Wolfpack, 11th-seeded dreamers, were dialing up a classic reboot of 1983, when they won nine straight postseason games to capture an unlikely title that left their frenetic coach, Jim Valvano, running onto the court looking for someone to hug.

In 2024, the Wolfpack went 9-for-9 under

similar must-win conditions to get this far.

“Didn’t get the big one,” said N.C. State guard DJ Horne, who finished with 20 points. “But it’s definitely a big accomplishment in my career.”

N.C. State aside, some might call this run by top-seeded Purdue as inconceivable as anything in college hoops this year.

This is a program well-versed in the art of disappointment and missed expectations. Edey returned for his senior season and led the Boilermakers to the Final Four for the first time since 1980 — one season after they became the second No. 1 seed to fall in the first round.

The Boilermakers (34-4), top-seeded again, will play Connecticut, an 86-72 winner over Alabama in the second semifinal, for the title on Monday night.

“The reason I came back is for playing games like this,” Edey said. “It’s the reason I’m playing college basketball for four years, to finally get this game, big-time.”

N.C. State (26-15) poked and jabbed at Edey and gave him fits through the entire

slugfest of a game. He still dominated the battle of big men against 6-9, 275-pound Wolfpack forward DJ Burns Jr., who labored to eight points and four assists.

Burns wasn’t the only one having trouble finding the basket. The N.C. State team that outscored Duke 55-37 after halftime in the Elite Eight — the team that had, in fact, outscored seven of nine opponents in the second half since its season became a win-or-go-home affair — shot 28.6% over the last 20 minutes this time.

“The biggest difference is that some of the shots we normally make we didn’t make,” Wolfpack coach Kevin Keatts said. “It kind of got away from us a little bit.”

It made for some ugly hoops. At one stretch early in the second half, the teams missed 10 straight shots between them.

“Obviously it was one of those grinder games,” Purdue coach Matt Painter said.

The shooting troubles cut both ways. Purdue’s second-leading scorer this season, Braden Smith, finished 1-for-9 for three points.



# 2019 World Series MVP Strasburg retires

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Washington Nationals pitcher Stephen Strasburg announced his retirement Sunday, ending the 2019 World Series MVP's injury-filled career.

Strasburg's retirement was listed on Major League Baseball's transaction page Saturday. Since leading Washington to its only World Series title five years ago, Strasburg pitched just 31½ innings over eight starts.

"I realized after repeated attempts to return to pitching, injuries no longer allow me to per-

form at a Major League level," Strasburg said in a statement.

Both Nationals owner Mark Lerner and general manager Mike Rizzo released statements congratulating Strasburg on his career.

"The impact he's had on our ball club is undeniable," Rizzo said. "He will go down as one of the best players in Washington Nationals history."

The 35-year-old Strasburg was 113-62 with a 3.24 ERA in 13 seasons and made three All-Star appearances. He led the National League with 18 victories in 2019 and then delivered a

dominant postseason, going 5-0 with a 1.98 ERA in six appearances. That included wins in Games 2 and 6 of the World Series in Houston.

He signed a seven-year, \$245 million contract in December 2019 but threw only 528 pitches in the majors since then. He had surgery for thoracic outlet syndrome, a nerve and blood disorder that led to the removal of a rib and two neck muscles.

Strasburg has not pitched since June 9, 2022, when he lasted 4⅓ innings in his lone start of the season before going back on the injured list.

Strasburg was viewed as a franchise cornerstone when Washington selected him with the No. 1 overall pick in the 2009 amateur draft. He arrived in the majors almost exactly a year later, when he struck out 14 in a debut against Pittsburgh.

Strasburg threw 150 regular-season innings five times, including a career-high 209 in 2019. He struck out 47 in 36⅓ innings that October.

"It was a privilege to watch him grow as a player and a person throughout his illustrious career," Lerner said in his statement.

## Marlins last winless team at 0-9 after loss to Cardinals

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The winless Miami Marlins, who are off to the worst start in the franchise's 33-year history, dropped their ninth consecutive game on Saturday, losing 3-1 to Steve Matz and the St. Louis Cardinals.

Iván Herrera and Brendan Donovan each had two hits for St. Louis. Jordan Walker contributed an RBI double.

Matz (2-0) surrendered four hits in five scoreless innings. Ryan Helsley pitched the ninth for his third save.

"I thought my fastball was working really well," said Matz, who threw 85 pitches. "I'd definitely like to go deeper into the game. Bullpen did a great job. It was a good win."

The Cardinals turned two double plays. Through nine games, St. Louis has not committed an error.

"Guys are continuing to play really good defense," manager Oliver Marmol said.

The 0-9 Marlins are the only winless team in baseball. The New York Mets, who dropped their first seven games, beat the Detroit Tigers 2-1 on Thursday for their first win.

**Athletics 4, Tigers 0:** Brent Rooker homered, Paul Black-

burn pitched six sparkling innings and visiting Oakland earned its second win of the season, beating Detroit.

Zack Gelof walked and scored three times as Oakland ended a four-game losing streak.

**Guardians 3, Twins 1:** David Fry hit a three-run homer and seven pitchers combined on a two-hitter, helping Cleveland beat host Minnesota.

Carlos Carrasco worked three innings of one-run ball. The 37-year-old right-hander struck out six before he was pulled after 78 pitches.

**Dodgers 4, Cubs 1:** Yoshinobu Yamamoto pitched out of two early jams in five scoreless innings for his first career major league victory, Max Muncy hit a two-run single and visiting Los Angeles beat Chicago.

Shohei Ohtani had two hits and reached base three times to help the Dodgers improve to 8-3 with their fifth victory in six games.

**Royals 3, White Sox 0:** Michael Wacha threw seven innings of two-hit ball and MJ Melendez launched a two-run homer as host Kansas City beat slumping Chicago.

Wacha (1-0) struck out eight and allowed just one runner

past first base. Royals pitchers have eight quality starts, most in the majors.

**Mariners 5, Brewers 3:** Jorge Polanco and Luis Urias homered, helping Bryce Miller and visiting Seattle beat Milwaukee.

Miller (1-1) struck out seven in seven shutout innings.

**Braves 9, Diamondbacks 8:** Austin Riley had three hits, the last an eighth-inning single that drove in the go-ahead run, and host Atlanta overcame a six-run, first-inning deficit to beat Arizona.

Jarred Kelenic, who had three hits, led off the eighth with a double off Luis Frias (0-1) before scoring on a single to right field by Ronald Acuña Jr. to tie it at 8. Acuña moved to second on right fielder Jake McCarthy's throwing error and scored on Riley's single to give Atlanta the lead.

**Phillies 5, Nationals 2:** J.T. Realmuto followed an intentional walk to Bryce Harper by driving a hanging curveball over the wall for a three-run homer, helping visiting Philadelphia beat Washington.

**Reds 9, Mets 6:** Spencer Steer hit a three-run homer during his team's five-run eighth

inning, helping host Cincinnati knock off New York.

**Pirates 5, Orioles 4 (11):** Oneil Cruz singled home the winning run in the 11th inning to give host Pittsburgh a victory over Baltimore.

**Rangers 7, Astros 2:** Marcus Semien hit a tiebreaking single, six Texas relievers limited Houston to three hits over 5⅓ innings, and the host Rangers overcame Corey Seager's two-run error to beat the Astros.

**Yankees 9, Blue Jays 8:** Aaron Judge, Giancarlo Stanton and Anthony Rizzo homered, and host New York chased Kevin Gausman in the second inning of a victory over Toronto.

**Padres 4, Giants 0:** Jurickson Profar hit an early grand slam and Michael King pitched seven sharp innings to lead visiting San Diego to a victory over San Francisco.

**Rays 8, Rockies 6:** Yandy Díaz hit a go-ahead two-run single to cap a five-run eighth inning and visiting Tampa Bay rallied to beat Colorado.

**Angels 2, Red Sox 1:** Rafael Devers' error at third base allowed the Angels to score two runs in the sixth inning, and host Los Angeles snapped a five-game winning streak by Boston.

# Penguins move into a playoff position

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Michael Bunting snapped a tie with 5:28 left in the third period, and the Pittsburgh Penguins beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 5-4 on Saturday.

Referee Steve Kozari was taken off the ice on a stretcher after colliding with Lightning defenseman Haydn Fleury 6:11 into the third period. Kozari was able to move his arms. Fleury did not return.

Evgeni Malkin had two goals and an assist for Pittsburgh, and Bunting also had two assists. Sidney Crosby and Kris Letang also scored.

Penguins goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic made 30 saves in his eighth straight start.

Pittsburgh (36-30-11) posted its fourth straight win and improved to 6-0-2 in its last eight games overall. It is fighting with Philadelphia, Washington and Detroit for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference.

The Lightning (43-27-7), who clinched a playoff berth Friday when the Flyers, Capitals and

Red Wings lost in regulation, had won 10 of their previous 12.

**Blackhawks 3, Stars 2:** Connor Bedard, Andreas Athanasiou and Seth Jones scored in the second period, and host Chicago stopped Dallas' franchise-record winning streak at eight games.

The Stars are three points ahead of second-place Colorado in the Western Conference's Central Division.

**Bruins 3, Panthers 2 (OT):** Jesper Boqvist scored 2:05 into overtime, Linus Ullmark stopped 28 shots and host Boston beat Florida in a matchup of the top two teams in the Atlantic Division.

First-place Boston moved five points ahead of second-place Florida.

**Jets 4, Wild 2:** Vladislav Namestnikov had a goal and two assists, linemate Alex Iafallo a goal and an assist, and visiting Winnipeg beat Minnesota.

Kyle Connor and Morgan Barron also scored, and Connor Hellebuyck made 25 saves for the Jets, who clinched a playoff berth Thursday.

**Sharks 3, Blues 2:** William Eklund scored in overtime to finish a hat trick, Devin Cooley made 34 saves in his first NHL win, and host San Jose beat St. Louis.

**Blue Jackets 6, Flyers 2:** Damon Severson and Zach Werenski each scored twice, Jet Greaves had 37 saves and host Columbus extended Philadelphia's skid to seven games.

**Maple Leafs 4, Canadiens 2:** Auston Matthews scored his league-leading 64th goal of the season in a four-goal second period and visiting Toronto defeated archrival Montreal.

Matthews hit the 100-point mark for the second time in his career and extended his point streak to 10 games in the process.

**Devils 4, Senators 3:** Brendan Smith had a goal and two assists and visiting New Jersey snapped a three-game losing streak by holding on for a win over Ottawa.

**Islanders 2, Predators 0:** Semyon Varlamov had a season-high 40 saves for his third shutout of the season, and host New

York beat Nashville, getting a crucial win in its playoff push.

Noah Dobson and Kyle Palmieri scored as the Islanders won their fourth straight to take a two-point lead over both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh for third place in the Eastern Conference. The Penguins hold the second wild card while the Flyers are out of a playoff position.

**Kings 6, Canucks 3:** Adrian Kempe had two goals and an assist, Trevor Moore reached 30 goals for the first time in his career and host Los Angeles got closer to wrapping up a playoff spot with a victory over Vancouver.

Los Angeles moved out of a wild card spot and into third place in the Pacific Division with five games remaining in the regular season.

**Oilers 4, Flames 2:** Evan Bouchard scored the tiebreaking goal midway through the third period, and visiting Edmonton beat Calgary to climb within three points of Vancouver for first place in the Pacific Division..

# Lakers move into eighth place in Western Conference

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — D'Angelo Russell scored 28 points, LeBron James added 24 and the Los Angeles Lakers extended their winning streak to four with a 116-97 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers on Saturday, moving into eighth place in the Western Conference.

Anthony Davis added 22 points and 13 rebounds in the Lakers' (45-33) ninth win in 10 games.

Darius Garland scored 26 points for Cleveland and Caris LeVert had 21 off the bench. The Cavaliers (46-32) remained in third place in the East but have dropped two straight and three of their last four.

**Nets 113, Pistons 103:** Cam Thomas scored 32 points and host Brooklyn rallied with a big fourth quarter for a victory over Detroit.

Dennis Schroder added 24 points and

Noah Clowney had 17 off the bench for the Nets, who won their second straight game. Mikal Bridges chipped in with 13 and Jalen Wilson finished with 10.

Detroit dropped to 13-65 with its fourth straight loss. Chimezie Metu led the Pistons with 20 points. Marcus Sasser finished with 18 and Jaden Ivey added 16.

**76ers 116, Grizzlies 96:** Joel Embiid had 30 points and 12 rebounds in just 23 minutes, Kelly Oubre Jr. added 17 points and visiting Philadelphia pulled within a half-game of seventh place in the Eastern Conference by beating short-handed Memphis.

Embiid was 9-for-13 from the floor, making both of his 3-point attempts. He checked out with seven minutes left in the third quarter and coach Nick Nurse saw no reason for him to return as Philadelphia maintained a comfortable lead in the second half en route to its fourth consecutive win.

Scotty Pippen Jr. led the Grizzlies with 24 points, while GG Jackson finished with 17. Jordan Goodwin added 15 for Memphis, which had its three-game winning streak snapped. Maozinha Pereira had 13 points and 11 rebounds.

**Nuggets 142, Hawks 110:** Jamal Murray returned to host Denver's lineup after missing seven games with a strained right knee and scored 16 points over 21 minutes in a clobbering of Atlanta.

Nikola Jokic recorded his 25th triple-double of the season even as he took the fourth quarter off and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added a season-high 24 points, propelling the Nuggets (54-24) into sole possession of first place in the Western Conference, a half-game ahead of the idle Minnesota Timberwolves, who visit Denver on Wednesday night.

Clint Capela led Atlanta with 19 points.